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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV PHUM KE](#)  
SUBJECT: KENYA COAST PEACE CONFERENCE DRAWS SRO CROWD

¶1. SUMMARY: Mombasa American Presence Post Officer (APPO) based in Nairobi attended a one-day peace conference in Mombasa. The conference, the theme of which was "Sustainable Peace and Development in the Coast" drew a standing-room-only crowd. Guests included provincial and district officials, members of parliament, ministry representatives, and Coast religious, business and civic leaders, including women and youth. Kenya's "Ambassador of Peace," Bethuel Kiplagat, stressed the importance of the link between peace and development. Break-out sessions allowed invitees to address problems in their districts and to begin considering solutions, using the many resources available to them from the conference. The conference organizers plan to hold a follow-on conference in the next several months to assess outcomes, which we will track as part of our peace-building efforts on the Coast and more generally throughout Kenya. END SUMMARY.

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PWANI 4 PEACE: LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR LOCAL PROBLEMS  
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¶2. On April 14, Mombasa American Presence Post officer (presently based in Nairobi) attended the one-day "Pwani 4 Peace Leaders' Conference 2008" in Mombasa. (Pwani is the Swahili word for 'coast.') Pwani 4 Peace, a Mombasa-based community support and development organization, is an initiative of local business, religious, women, and youth leaders formed after the disputed December 2007 elections to promote peace. The group is credited by the Provincial Commissioner of Coast Province with having prevented violent outbreaks in the weeks following the elections through the various activities it organized.

¶3. The theme of the conference was "Sustainable Peace and Development in the Coast." The 350 invitees included Members of Parliament, government officials at the Provincial and District levels, representatives of government ministries having offices in the province, religious and business leaders, and civic groups. (Note: The U.S. Embassy was the only foreign entity attending the conference; APPO was treated

as a special guest, with seating on the dais. End Note.) Chase Bank and SafariCom (Kenya's largest telecommunications company) were among the conference's sponsors. Attendance was standing room only.

¶4. In his keynote speech and official opening, Coast Provincial Commissioner Ernest G. Munyi outlined several of the problems facing local communities: high unemployment, particularly among the youth; land issues, including squatters; drug trafficking and use; and severe poverty.

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KENYA'S AMBASSADOR OF PEACE  
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¶5. Kenya's "Ambassador of Peace," Bethuel Kiplagat, was the conference's chief guest and main speaker (Note: Kiplagat is a career diplomat who served as Kenya's Ambassador to France and High Commissioner to Great Britain, was a former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as special envoy to the Somalia Peace Talks. Kiplagat is one of core members of Concerned Citizens for Peace, another peace initiative of prominent Kenyan leaders formed in the wake of the election crisis. End Note.)

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¶6. Kiplagat hailed Pwani4Peace as a local initiative that should set an example for other provinces. He praised the (self-financed) group for bringing stakeholders from across the province into one room for discussions and focusing on the link between peace and development.

¶7. Kiplagat emphasized the need to map different conflict zones and look at the underlying problems with brutal frankness. He told the group, for example, that one cannot say that the recent elections were free and fair from the beginning. He cited political zones which "belong" to a party, where other parties can't campaign. He also cited a mentality of power instead of service to the country which must be overcome. Kiplagat said that all have a responsibility for what happened either through their silence or their encouragement. He counseled avoiding setting up commissions, stating, "We know what the problem is; let's deal with it!" He also encouraged attendees to shed their mentality of dependence, saying, "We have more than enough resources in ourselves."

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PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT  
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¶9. Seven Members of Parliament (one-third of elected MPs from the Coast Province) were present and spoke briefly. They pledged to join together for economic development, to define common objectives, and to rectify resource imbalances. Provincial department heads of ministries and microfinance institutions later presented a session on entrepreneurial opportunities on the Coast.

¶10. When asked to identify problems and injustices in their respective regions, response from attendees was overwhelming. Given that

their list covered everything from agriculture to witchcraft, it is easy to understand why people feel overwhelmed and powerless. Land issues figured prominently among the complaints, along with poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment and lack of employee rights, unequal access to the benefits of natural resources (both mineral and wildlife), and illiteracy and school dropouts. But the exercise also helped them to focus on the role that local communities, in concert with local government, can play in resolving some of these issues.

¶11. COMMENT: Pwani4Peace organizers were justifiably proud of the outcome of the conference, and the organization plans to hold a follow-on conference in a few months to revisit issues that were discussed and to assess progress towards resolving them at the local level. This conference is important in that it is the first time that such an event has been conceived, funded and implemented by strong community leaders overlooking ethnic and religious differences and coming together for a greater common cause. Their ability to attract strong government support (the Provincial Commissioner spent the full day at the conference, and most Members of Parliament stayed for several hours) gives the group additional clout in the province. APPO will continue to follow the organization's activities to see if they can continue the momentum and goodwill generated by the conference.

¶12. COMMENT, CONT: The Nairobi-based APPO's presence at the conference and a Coastal Security Workshop, which is being reported septel, underscored the need for a permanent U.S.

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presence in Mombasa. We appreciate the AF Bureau's continued strong support for opening an APP in Mombasa as soon as funding becomes available.